

U.S. officials should realize China is an economic and military threat to America, and take steps — like building a bigger Navy — to combat Beijing's moves, Rep. Allen West (R-Fla.) said Tuesday.

"We have to admit that China is a conventional threat to the United States," West said in a muscular foreign policy speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington.

The freshman lawmaker and favorite of the Tea Party movement also said Washington should avoid Pentagon spending cuts as it tries to reduce annual deficits.

After an \$18 billion cut for this year and more likely ahead, West said Washington is on pace to return the military to a time when the Army could not afford basic items, such as toilet paper.

His comments came as the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee revealed a Pentagon spending bill that would, if enacted, give the Defense Department \$665 billion for 2012. That figure includes two House Appropriations subcommittees' proposals for the base DOD budget, a military construction funding bill and a war-funding measure

West said the moves China has made in building up its military and expanding its role in global economics make it "part of the 21st-century battlefield" U.S. officials are facing.

U.S. leaders, he said, are doing a poor job so far managing this new "battlefield."

West called for a much larger U.S. Navy to compete with what in China will soon be the world's largest naval fleet.

The U.S. Navy now has 285 "deployable battle force ships," according to a fact sheet on the service's website.

The fleet size has come down steadily over the last several decades. The Navy had 654 active warships in 1972, 594 in 1987 and 337 by 1999, according to another Navy fact sheet.

The Chinese understand what the Greeks, Romans, Athenians and Dutch did in past eras — that a large and powerful navy is the way to expand a nation's global presence, West said.

More broadly, the freshman representative panned U.S. officials for failing, “over the last 10 years,” to clearly define America's strategic objectives.

To that end, he called for a new strategic blueprint that matches desired military capabilities to the threats the nation faces.

West also slammed President Obama for a revised policy approach on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which would feature land swaps based on pre-1967 borders in that hotly contested region.

“I don't care about how much land you swap, it's about the elimination of the Jewish people” for groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, West said.

The retired Army officer also pointed to the Egyptian military's twin decisions to open a passage from that nation to Palestinian-controlled territory and allow Iranian warships through the Suez Canal.

West said such moves could be previewing what would be a “three-front war” for Israel against “an Egyptian-backed Hamas,” Hezbollah and Iran, which he noted has nuclear weapons.

What would the hawkish, pro-Israel West do? He said he would start by “eliminating” Hamas.

